

# Corps members are trouble shooters following Hurricane Katrina

by Grant Sattler U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Japan District Public Affairs

**C**all them trouble shooters. Members of the team executing FEMA's Operation Blue Roof for 16 counties in southern Mississippi, they hunt down errant paperwork, fix slip ups, correct miscommunication, and follow up shoddy workmanship to ensure callers to 1-888-ROOF-BLU get the straight answers they deserve.

While the great majority of callers to 1-888-ROOF-BLU want to know how soon their temporary roof will be installed, some have complaints that need to be looked into.

"For the status calls, if the operators can't answer the question immediately from the database, we check with the prime contractor [CERES] and then call back to inform the homeowners and ease their minds. At this point in time, once it's assigned to a contractor it's getting done pretty fast," said trouble shooter Sammie Cervantes, a public affairs specialist with the Mid Pacific Region of the Bureau of Reclamation in Sacramento, Calif. Bureau personnel are augmenting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for emergency operations and are a key part of the effort to manage installation of more than 44,000 temporary roofs requested in southern Mississippi.

Jack Delk, however, was one of the callers with a problem. He signed a Right of Entry (ROE) form at the end of September, and while a contractor crew arrived at his rural Forrest County home within a reasonable period of 20 days, they looked at the damage to the Delk's home and left. The ROE was marked DSQ, database shorthand for disqualified. End of story.

Not quite. Delk's home, heavily damaged by pine trees and a 100-year-old oak felled by Hurricane Katrina's destructive winds as it plowed across southern Mississippi, appeared to fall into the program's gray zone. To qualify, at least half of the structure must be intact and the roof capable of safely supporting the weight of a roofing crew.

Although damage to their home was extensive, Delk and his wife did not qualify for a FEMA-provided trailer. Left with multiple large Katrina-inspired skylights, Delk placed a call to FEMA's Operation Blue Roof 1-888-ROOF-BLU and

explained his predicament. Operators there verified the DSQ status of his request, filled out a trouble ticket explaining the circumstances, and passed it over to the trouble shooters.

They visited the residence the next day.

"We determined it could be done and had the homeowner sign a new Right of Entry form that we marked 'Do not DSQ'," said

Armando Najera, a hydraulic engineer from the Corps Albuquerque District. The trouble shooters hand carried it to CERES, the prime contractor for



**Blue roofing projects along Hurricane Katrina's path the fall of 2005.**

*courtesy photo*



**Photo by Alan Sattler, USACE Armando Najera, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Albuquerque, far right, and Becky Ortiz, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation - Sacramento, far left, talk with a homeowner regarding repair work on his home following a 100 year-old oak tree that Hurricane Katrina sent crashing upon it.**

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FEMA's Blue Roof program in Mississippi. "This job was going to take more work, but it was within the scope of the program," Najera said.

Cervantes said that the materials stipulated in the contract — plastic, battens, two-by-fours, and plywood sheets — were sufficient for the job. "Some of the jobs aren't a simple run of the plastic from one end of the roof to the other," she said. "They are more complicated and need some structural repair work done."

The contractor assigned a capable crew belonging to one of its 52 subcontractors to the job. "They put one of the best crews on this one," Cervantes said. "The trouble calls really do get personal attention. From us, from the contractor, and the work crews."

Jack Delk was very pleased with the workers who made moderate structural support and installed his temporary roof. "The guys were just super," he said. "They got it on fast."

Not an uncommon sentiment as the work crews are rapidly gaining, putting on Blue Roofs faster than Right of Entry forms are taken from homeowners. ROEs are used to authorize the Corps, its agents, and contractors necessary access to the homeowner's property and authorize the work.

Trouble shooter Becky Ortiz, an administrative assistant from the Bureau of Reclamation's Mid Pacific Region, said the program is working very well. "CERES has been really good about working with us to get the trouble calls done," Ortiz said. "They get their crews right out. They know when we bring a trouble ticket that it really is a problem that needs to be fixed. It feels great to help people who may have thought they were at a dead-end."

The trouble shooters do field work in a four-county area around Hattiesburg, where the Emergency Field Office North and the Operation Blue Roof Call Center for Mississippi are located. "We work with the leads in the field for working calls within the remaining 12 counties of the 16 that Hattiesburg covers," Najera said. "What's critical here is that when they go through the call center that we are responsive and they have another opportunity to have someone look at their house."

But some homes are just too severely damaged to install a blue roof. "Even if we go out and have to tell the homeowner that their house is disqualified,

we try to steer them to other resources for help, either private agencies or FEMA," Cervantes said.



## Hurricane Katrina statistics:

- One of America's largest natural disasters
- More than 1,300 dead
- Category 5 strength less than 12 hours before landfall
- 127 MPH wind at Louisiana landfall
- Maximum surge of 28-30 feet along Mississippi coast
- 75 percent of New Orleans flooded

## Mission: Louisiana & Mississippi/completion:

Ice	2,833 trucks	/	100%
Water	3,117 trucks	/	100%
Power	1,337 assessed	/	100%
	(418 installed)	/	100%
Roofing	131,210	/	100%
Structures	1,026	/	85%
Debris	36 million (cy)	/	77%

## Higher Levels of Protection:

South Louisiana Hurricane Protection and Restoration Report – preliminary report due June 2006, final December 2007.